

Mystery Shopper Scam Alert

The Delaware State Police are issuing the following advisory in response to the recent reappearance of ***the Mystery Shopper Scam***. This is a general awareness advisory applicable statewide. The following tips and information will help you avoid falling victim to this specific scam.

What is Mystery Shopping?

Some retailers hire companies to evaluate the quality of service in their stores and they often use mystery shoppers to get that information. They instruct a mystery shopper to make a particular purchase in a store or restaurant, and then report on the experience. Typically, the shopper is reimbursed and can keep the product or service. Sometimes the shopper receives a small payment, as well.

Many professionals in the field consider mystery shopping a part-time activity, at best. These opportunities generally are posted online by marketing research or merchandising companies.

Don't Pay to Be a Mystery Shopper

Dishonest promoters use newspaper ads and emails to create the impression that mystery shopping jobs are a gateway to a high-paying job with reputable companies. They often create websites where you can "register" to become a mystery shopper, but first you have to pay a fee – for information about a certification program, a directory of mystery shopping companies, or a guarantee of a mystery shopping job.

It is not necessary to pay anyone to get into the mystery shopper business. The certification offered is almost always worthless. A list of companies that hire mystery shoppers is available for free, and legitimate mystery shopper jobs are listed on the internet for free. If you try to get a refund

from the promoters, you will be out of luck. Either the business won't return your phone calls, or if it does, it's to try another pitch.

Don't Wire Money

You may have heard about people who are "hired" to be mystery shoppers, and told that their first assignment is to evaluate a money transfer service, like Western Union or MoneyGram. The shopper receives a check with instructions to deposit it in a personal bank account, withdraw the amount in cash, and wire it to a third party. The check is a fake.

By law, banks must make the funds from deposited checks available within days, but uncovering a fake check can take weeks. It may seem that the check has cleared and that the money has posted to the account, but when the check turns out to be a fake, the person who deposited the check and wired the money will be responsible for paying back the bank.

It's never a good idea to deposit a check from someone you don't know and then wire money back.

Tips for Finding Legitimate Mystery Shopping Jobs

Don't do business with mystery shopping promoters who:

- Advertise for mystery shoppers in a newspaper's 'help wanted' section or by email.
- Require that you pay for "certification."
- Guarantee a job as a mystery shopper.
- Charge a fee for access to mystery shopping opportunities.
- Sell directories of companies that hire mystery shoppers.
- Ask you to deposit a check and wire some or all of the money to someone.

If you're looking for legitimate mystery shopping jobs, check out the [Mystery Shopping Providers Association](#) for a database of authentic companies. But if you spot any scams, report them to the FTC at [ftc.gov/complaint](https://www.ftc.gov/complaint) and your local police.

These tips have been provided by the Federal Trade Commission. Click on the following link to view further information: <https://www.consumer.ftc.gov/blog/2019/07/mystery-shop-til-you-drop-not-so-fast>

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